Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: For many families, summer means taking vacations to relax, soak in the sun and spend quality time with loved ones. Whether you take a short road trip or venture overseas to explore, the goal is to enjoy a fun, stress-free holiday. I'm Emily Yeap.

Dr. Stephanie Hein, department head of hospitality leadership at Missouri State University, joins me today to offer some tips and advice on maximizing your summer vacation.

Dr. Hein: To get good deals, you really need to book as far in advance as you possibly can. If you have a particular destination in mind, the sooner you can book, the better. Particularly with airfare. The days of cheap airfare are almost gone and if you book out of the Springfield airport, you really need to book your airfare far in advance because the plane are full. Airlines aren't discounting a lot of their seats.

Emily Yeap: Should people also reserve accommodation as early as possible?

Dr. Hein: If it's a high demand area, typically the earlier you book, the better. However, with hotels, I also encourage people to continue to monitor those prices because sometimes the price might dip a little bit the closer that they get to their travel date. It all depends on supply and demand. If there is a particular hotel that you have to stay in, that you know is in a popular destination, go ahead and book it but continue to monitor to see if maybe that price drops down the closer you get to your trip.

I also encourage people, if they subscribe to AAA, then to plug in that rate because often you can find a lower rate than what might be initially posted and you may not have to purchase in advance.

Emily Yeap: Scoring good travel deals takes time, patience and effort.

Dr. Hein: Even when I plan my own vacations, it becomes a little overwhelming to try to get the best deals. A couple of tools that I typically use. I use Google Flights a lot. That gives me a good overview of what's happening in the marketplace and I also use Kayak to monitor price changes that might be happening with airfare. And with Kayak, they have an indicator of when you might want to buy and when you might want to hold on that purchase. There are some differences between the tools but each of them have their own advantage.

Emily Yeap: When thinking of buying a package deal, always double check.

Dr. Hein: Occasionally you will find some good package deals to work with but always price them out separately first so that you have a good comparison before you buy.

Emily Yeap: To avoid a stressful holiday, be flexible.

Dr. Hein: I have traveled with little kids to young adults. My children are older now, so I understand the stresses of traveling with younger kids. I always encourage people to do some planning in advance in what you want to do but still have flexibility. I think if you over plan your trip, it takes some of the fun out and it can stress your kids out as well. Pick a few things that are must see items or must do events, and then build in the rest of your activities when you're on site so that you're not over scheduling. You're not pushing people too hard and you're not having meltdowns.

Emily Yeap: If possible, try to travel during off peak times.

Dr. Hein: When you look at summer travel, usually it's best to go either late May, early June. Or if you can, go in August. As you ramp up into the Fourth of July, prices tend to climb. Once you hit that Fourth of July week, you'll have a couple weeks after and prices start to decline.

Emily Yeap: If you're planning local travel, don't forget to contact the convention and visitors bureaus in the town you're visiting beforehand.

Dr. Hein: They're going to have an updated list of events that are occurring when you're going to be there. Quite often, they have discounts that they have negotiated with some of their marketing partners so you might be able to take advantage of those opportunities that will help you maximize your fun and your dollar.

Emily Yeap: When planning a road trip, look off the beaten path.

Dr. Hein: Particularly if you're going during peak season, some of those main attractions can be busy. So look for some of those outdoor types of activities. If you go down south, even into Arkansas, they're beautiful hiking trails. A lot of things to do outside. If you like the rivers, certainly going on the river network that we have within both Missouri and Arkansas. It's a great way to spend some time and it doesn't cost a lot.

Emily Yeap: That was Dr. Stephanie Hein, department head of hospitality leadership at Missouri State. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.